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ABSTRACT

Since 1983, DeKalb College (DC), in Clarkston, Georgia, has had a special program of services for deaf students, including interpreting, notetaking, tutoring, career advisement, and remediation. In 1988, the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center (GSRC) opened in College Park, providing such services as evaluation, counseling, independent living, and job-seeking skills, and adult and computer literacy training to Georgians who are deaf and/or blind. Shortly after GSRC opened, a memorandum of understanding was established between DC and GSRC to promote the sharing of resources and expertise. The five areas of service identified in the memorandum were academic placement, remediation/preparation, coping skills/strategies, community services, and counseling. To assist underprepared students, special developmental and pre-developmental courses were created. The six areas addressed by the agreement were the referral process; information sharing; decision making; service provision; exit and follow-up procedures; and documentation issues. Specific provisions, such as assuring client involvement at all levels of decision making, and primary involvement of GSRC in independent living skills, and of DC in academic development for clients in GSRC's residential program, were also included in the memorandum. Currently, the institutions operate a joint program which employs two part-time DC instructors who provide 10 instructional hours per week. GSRC provides 1 day of evaluation and 2 days of study skills and career information workshops. Five of the original six students completed the six-quarter program. (PAA)

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# Collaborating with Rehabilitation Centers for At Risk Students

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## Synopsis

This article is a description of the development and three-year implementation of a Cooperative Agreement between DeKalb College and the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center. The agreement was initiated by DeKalb College due to the increase in applicants with potential to prepare for developmental studies. These needs included assessment, academic upgrading, vocational information, and study skills improvement. During this time, the Georgia Division of Rehabilitation Services established the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center with a mandate to network with existing services. The timing of increased demand at DeKalb College and development of the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center was right for initiation of this program. Resources of both institutions will be described and how they "are matched."

This paper also addresses the actual details of the agreement and pros and cons of implementation and maintenance. Issues of bureaucracy (two different institutions), staff turf protection, meeting program requirements at two different sites, funding, stigma of college students at a rehabilitation center, use of computer assisted instruction, and supervising staff are addressed.

NOTE: This paper in original form was presented at the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association bi-annual conference in Chicago, IL on May 22, 1991.

## Introduction

Cooperative agreements have been around for quite some time. Governments have formed alliances to wage both war and peace. Churches and social organizations have relied upon community resources to meet the needs of their parishioners or consumers. The folklore of log cabin building and hog dressing are examples of community cooperation that were recorded by a group of high school students as a class project (Wigginton, 1972). It just makes good sense to cooperate, share resources, and arrive at a common goal or fulfill a mutual need.

There are numerous contemporary examples:

1. In Toward Independence (1986), the National Council on the Handicapped acknowledges "coordinated services" exist but goes further to recommend these be mandated as well.
2. Inter-agency cooperation is being written into legislation as can be seen in the Carl Perkins Vocational Educational Act (PL 98-524), the Rehabilitation Amendments of 1986 (PL 99-506), and the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 (PL 100-407). The Tech Act describes in its use of funds that the grantee is to develop cooperative agreements with other states.
3. The private sector is involved too. The Apple Computer Company has donated computers for networking purposes within a community. IBM links with the National Easter Seal Society, United Cerebal Palsy Associations, and Courage Center to administer portions of their "Offering for Persons with Disabilities."

4. The University of Tennessee administers a Post-Secondary Education Consortium which makes available and accessible college training for deaf persons throughout the southeast.

The list could go on and on. There are a myriad of types of formal and informal memorandums of understanding, agreement, and coordination or cooperation. These are found scattered throughout the field as evidence of the need for individuals and organizations to network. In Transition from School to Work (1988) it is stated that "plans must be developed and implemented that provide for regular and frequent face-to-face interaction of interagency teams at the service delivery level."

This presentation details the cooperation between DeKalb College and the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center.

DeKalb College is a two-year institution and is part of the University System of Georgia, located in the eastern part of the city of Atlanta. There is a designated program for students, who are deaf, which is jointly funded by DeKalb College and the post-secondary education consortium from the University of Tennessee. This program has been in operation since 1983. Services (interpreting, notetaking, tutoring, career advisement, and developmental studies) have been made available to hearing impaired students in this setting. At the time of the initial development of cooperation there were nine students involved in the program and it should be stressed this agreement was intended to broaden the base of an already existing established program. Enrollment varies from 30-40 students.

The Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center (GSRC) was funded during fiscal year 1988 with the physical plant opening and first staff in place on January 3, 1988. GSRC is a comprehensive residential rehabilitation center providing rehabilitation services of evaluation, counseling, independent living and job seeking skills, and adult and computer literacy training for Georgians who are deaf and/or blind.

The development of this memorandum of understanding came about as the result of student needs exceeding resources at DeKalb College and GSRC's available resources and need of a population to receive services.

The five areas of student needs were academic placement, remediation/preparation, coping skills/strategies, residential, and counseling. As many of the deaf students who enrolled at Dekalb College were not prepared for college level work, they did enroll in the developmental studies program. Even this program did not meet the needs of all students and a pre-developmental studies had to be established. The usual academic testing done at the college did not assist the instructors with pinpointing specific weaknesses and strengths of the students: therefore, a more diagnostic type of academic placement was required. There was also a need to establish instruction in basic academics to allow students to enter developmental studies. Part of the problems presented by the students was a need to acquire or become more appropriate in their study skills, understanding the relationship between their work and college and an eventual career, acquiring skills to access the computer assisted instruction lab, and assistance with placement in the

community. Since not all of the students served were from the Atlanta area, they were in need of residential services. Concurrent with that was the need for training to develop the necessary independent living skills so that the student would be able to function successfully on his/her own. This also included a need for mobility, either individually with personal transportation or use of the public transportation system in Atlanta. Finally, there was a need for personal social adjustment counseling as well as career/vocational guidance counseling.

At the same time the above needs were identified at DeKalb College, the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center was operationalizing the mandated mission to provide services. This involved recruiting and filling positions of very highly skilled and specialized instructors as well as ordering and putting in place the technology and other needed items necessary to fill up a 22,000 square foot center and 12 apartments. By August of 1988, there was available a skilled vocational evaluator, a specialized adjustment instructor in remedial education, a laboratory with computer assisted instruction, an adjustment instructor in independent living, a rehabilitation counselor for the deaf, 12 apartment units, three buses, and two drivers.

A cooperative memorandum of understanding was developed between DeKalb College and GSRC which identified five areas of service: placement, preparation, coping skills, community services, and counseling. These needs of DeKalb College students were met through GSRC's evaluation unit, instructional area, use of apartments and buses, and counseling.

## Agreement Detail

As this memorandum of understanding was developed, six areas which had to be considered are described below:

1. Referral process - There has to be a clear delineation of how inter-facility referrals will be handled. This involves meeting both program requirements and sharing of information (client confidentiality issues). Trust is another important factor as a background review of referral information done by one facility needs to meet requirements and be thorough enough for the other program to accept it.
2. Information sharing - This is divided into two parts. The first is informal sharing of client progress, problems, etc. among professionals involved with the client. The second area is more formal information including written reports and attendance at clients staffings.
3. Decision making - There are four factors involved with determining program direction. First is that actual client involvement and input must be assured at all levels of decision making. Next is internal decisions as these relate to what is done specifically within GSRC or DeKalb College. Third are joint decisions which will involve both

institutions. For example, the college academic advisor deals with appropriate courses taken while the GSRC counselor deals with roommate problems. Both professionals cooperate while counseling the student about career advisement (rehabilitation) and selection of a major (college). And fourth, for those clients who have a field vocational rehabilitation counselor, he or she must be included in the process.

4. Service provision - The significant question to be answered is - who will be the primary service provider and which institution will be complimentary or secondary? There is also a need for continuity of case management, especially as changes or shifts occur from one center to the other. With Atlanta area students it was very clear that DeKalb College was the primary service provider, with GSRC providing some secondary services (placement, evaluation, coping skills workshops, and some counseling). However, for those clients who were also in GSRC's residential program, all activities directed towards development of independent living skills were the primary responsibility of GSRC, with academic development the primary responsibility of DeKalb College.

5. Exit and follow-up procedures - Questions relating to these areas must be determined as to who will provide final documentation and follow-up services. In this case, usual GSRC policy (exit interview, case summary, and follow-up) was followed.

6. Documentation issues - These must be decided up front as to which facility will provide evaluation, interim, and exit report(s). With this agreement, it was decided the responsibile professional, i.e. evaluator, academic advisor, etc. would provide usual reports.

## Implementation and Maintenance Issues

The memorandum of understanding was developed by the directors of both programs and there was top down support of this agreement being successful. Following is a list of the major implementation and maintenance issues related to successful cooperative agreement.

Bureaucracy - As with any new course in a college, the administrative channels for approval of the course had to be followed. Since initial implementation, the course has become integrated into the expected institutional course offerings. Since GSRC is autonomous in program development there was no problem in this area.

Turf issues - These present ongoing challenges to maintenance. The "whose program is it?" issue can be easily identified. The program is

marketed as the "Collegiate Skills Improvement Program for the Hearing Impaired" at GSRC within the rehabilitation community.

However, it is generally referred to as "COMM 95" at DeKalb College which is reflective of the course name and number. Initially, the program was hosted primarily at GSRC but as student needs were identified resources were developed at DeKalb College. Concurrently, as more clients were admitted to GSRC the program shifted to the college campus with GSRC support on site. In time, there has become a level of comfort for all as it pertains to turf. Staff from both facilities are busy with respective duties and a conscious effort is necessary to ensure continuation.

Program requirements - DeKalb College has minimum requirements of an SAT score of 250 verbal and 280 math. A College Placement Examination is required of students who score 400 or below in either discipline. These requirements cannot be waived for any student. GSRC does prefer the student be a client of the Division of Rehabilitation Services but this is not mandatory. It was requested that individuals who are not DRS clients be informed of rehabilitation services and how to access these services should they so desire.

Funding - It is required that all students pay a tuition to matriculate in the college. Initially, there was no cost to DeKalb College as program costs were borne by GSRC. As need for this program was demonstrated,

the college was able to build this into their own budget. The GSRC staff and equipment were funded through Section 110 monies and there was no cost to the students.

Stigma - The issues of college students at a rehabilitation center and rehabilitation clients at a college had to be addressed. It has been our experience that it is most important that staff maintain a perspective of the individuals as students or they will not participate in the program. This "self-esteem" issue proved to be very critical. With the emphasis on the academic or "college" preparation that students were receiving we were able to continue the program with a low dropout rate. This issue has been virtually eliminated by shifting the site from GSRC to DeKalb College. Of the original six students in this program, there were five completors.

Computer assisted instruction - Originally GSRC used the Program Learning and Training Opportunities (PLATO) system which is now replaced with NovaNet. This system was found not to be effective with deaf clients due to language and instructional problems. As the shift in location from GSRC to DeKalb College occurred a more traditional remediation approach was taken by instructors hired through the college.

Staff supervision - It is very important to maintain a separate program prospective and adhere to direct lines of authority protocol. For

example if the issue is need for an instructor to comply with the established plan of services then the immediate supervisor is the appropriate person to deal with this issue not personnel from the other program.

Program monitoring/changes - As stated earlier the original intent was to provide the bulk of the program at the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center. Now the program has been shifted to the DeKalb College campus with GSRC support. There is also a more diverse group of students who need night and/or weekend training which has necessitated providing support at varying times. Additionally, there has been an increased utilization of GSRC by other clients, which further necessitated a shift to the college campus. College administration supported the continuation of this program for two clear reasons. The first was the number of students who are deaf or hard of hearing who were not able to participate in the established developmental program. The second was a demonstration of the desire on the part of administration to meet the needs of this group of students.

Staffing Pattern(s) - Originally GSRC provided one half day three times a week of computer assisted instruction. This also included one to two days of assessment and intermittant counseling. Currently, DeKalb College has two part-time instructors providing 10 instructional hours each per week. GSRC provides one day of evaluation and two days of study skills and career information workshops. GSRC continues to provide residential and

independent living training services for those who are eligible.

Program Considerations - Originally, this program was designed to last four quarters. Students were completing and still unable to enter successfully the established remedial program. The current length is six quarters. This impacts the funding of students as DRS and/or financial aid have time limited support which, in some situations, places the financial costs on the student. Also, it is necessary to evaluate the number and type of support seminars which are available and/or required.

## Summary

The benefits of this memorandum of understanding are three-fold and rather obvious. All of the students did receive services they needed to participate in a post-secondary education program and develop their academic skills. The program demonstrated to college administration the need for these type of services. Subsequently, this was built into the budget. For GSRC, resources were utilized and it was demonstrated to funding sources that the services were necessary and valuable.

The primary challenge of the future is to maintain the program and to prevent it from growing stagnant. This will be done through annual formal reviews of the memorandums, informal discussions, as well as student needs assessment. The issues as discussed above will have to be considered. However, continued management support will serve to ensure maintenance.

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